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ABSTRACT

The Rutgers University Career Opportunities Program (GCOP) was designed to give graduate opportunities to otherwise excluded groups. Presently the program requires 60 credit hours of college from applicants, although a baccalaureate degree is not required. Almost without exception GCOP students are non-white and poor, and the program often provides a stipend of up to $5,200 a year to interns who cannot otherwise afford to go to school. In an effort to describe the program, this report emphasizes evaluation, origin of the concept, implementation of the program, source of funds, student profiles, changes of the program, student evaluation, evaluators, and a brief overview of the success of GCOP. (MJM)

COP Bulletin 4

Vol. II, 1974-75

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THE RUTGERS GRADUATE COP PROGRAM

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH EDUCATION & WELFARE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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Imagine a speaker addressing the following remarks to an audience:

> I know of a graduate program that accepts people off the street who haven't gone to college, pays them more than $5,000, and within a year awards them a master's degree. (Our speaker continues with a shrug and a voice full of sympathy and understanding) Of course I support efforts which offer minority group members opportunities for leadership positions, and, as you know, I have declared myself in favor of cutting the welfare rolls, but . . . (now standing tall, voice firm) . . . Ladies and gentlemen, is it too much to ask that these people go to college first, that they earn their way up the ladder the way you and I did? (thunderous applause, approving shouts from the audience).

Had this scenario actually taken place, our speaker would have provoked more than applause: reporters would already be sniffing around the Graduate Career Opportunities Program (GCOP). But, nonetheless, let us consider our imaginary speaker's criticisms, for many similar ones have been voiced in the course of GCOP's brief history.

"We most certainly do not just take people in off the streets, or off the bus, or off the welfare rolls," says Dr. Frances Riley, the program's Associate Director. "We have a very tough screening process, including an admissions panel that can spot a phony at 50 paces. We haven't had a single dropout, and I'll bet no other graduate program in America can make that statement." Nor is the "no college" accusation supported by the facts, Riley says. "Our rule-of-thumb is about 60 credit hours of college, even though we do not require a baccalaureate degree, and only about two-thirds of the students get GCOP stipends. $5,200 is the maximum, and lots don't get that much."

In fact, Fran Riley explains, GCOP students aren't kids--the average age is over 34--and the home university (Rutgers) thinks enough of the "kids" to have admitted 14 of them into doctoral programs.

A number of people and programs fathered, mothered and nurtured GCOP. The Career Opportunities Program is the trunk of the family tree: the Education Professions Development ACT (EPDA) and the Bureau of Education Professions Development (BEPD) are the roots. Dr. Samuel Proctor and the aformentioned Dr. Frances Riley are the--what to call them?--the landscape architects.

The Career Opportunities Program (COP) is an undergraduate program, of course. It serves as an "entry point" for teacher aides in urban and rural school systems. Through COP, aides are trained and credentialed as full-fledged, but extraordinary, teachers. Extraordinary because they are indigenous to the community, because they are Vietnam veterans or veterans of life in the ghettos, barrios, "hollers" or on the reservations of America.

The legislative authority for COP (and therefore GCOP) is the Education Professions Development Act, a rather remarkable piece of legislation. One section of EPDA allows the U.S. Office of Education to create training programs without the specific approval of the Congress

(which has its say later, at appropriations time). COP was one of the first programs established by Dr. Don Davies, the teacher educator hired to run the Bureau (BEPD) that administered EPDA.

EVALUATION: THE PERENNIAL PROBLEM

From the first, how to evaluate COP was something of a problem. Measuring teacher effectiveness has proved to be a terribly tough nut to crack. How then to quantify the impact of COP-trained aides on kids? The COP hypothesis was that indigenous, "street smart," elementary school teachers would lead to improvements in the children's learning. But learning gains, as measured by standardized tests, are fickle; they must persist over several years before statisticians will dispel the cloud of qualifying statements that fill the footnotes of their studies. And years of further study introduce new complications--the kids move out of the school district, have new teachers, and are absent on the days the tests are given, and so forth.

Meanwhile, decisions have to be made about COP projects themselves: should a grant (to the school system running the project) be cut, increased, or maintained at the same level? Are the aides being used in professional and paraprofessional roles; or are the schools sliding into bad habits--using COP aides to police the halls and the cafeteria, for example? Is the COP program reaching out into the community, and is the cooperating university's academic program rigorous without being unfair?

The people running COP came to believe that the untrained observer would not be able to answer the tough questions. They knew, as program officers everywhere know, that projects face an irresistible temptation to put on their best behavior when Washington comes to call. If COP, they reasoned, could come train and credential its own "action researchers," then the visitors from Washington wouldn't be aliens, and the projects wouldn't have to use valuable energy putting their best foot forward. What's more, COP-trained action researchers would be sensitive to aides' problems--like too much cafeteria duty or an inappropriate academic experience--and that would put pressure on the local school district to improve its product.

GCOP: AN IDEA IS BORN

Thus the idea for a Graduate Career Opportunities Program was born. That was 1969, which is when Dr. Samuel DeWitt Proctor enters the picture. Sam Proctor is not a stranger to Washington, nor to EPDA, as it turns out. He worked for the Peace Corps and the Office of Economic Opportunity in their salad days, and he also served as president of two Black private colleges, Virginia Union University and North Carolina A&T. He is now the senior minister of the Abyssinian Baptist Church in New York City, the Martin Luther King, Jr., Professor at the Rutgers Graduate School of Education, and an official of the National Council of Churches. "And don't forget," he says with a laugh, "I worked for BEPD for two whole days, back in 1968." Let him tell the story.

"I had been asked to head the division that was to administer COP, and I accepted. I went to Washington and filled out all the proper papers, and then I got to thinking. So I asked, 'How many people are there between me and a decision?' They said, 'What do you mean, Sam?' And I said, 'When my division has a great idea for a project, how many people above me have to approve it before we can do it?' Well, somebody counted five, six if you include the Secretary of HEW, and so I asked them to withdraw all those papers I had filled out, and I moved on. You know, I guess I was spoiled by Sargent Shriver and OEO. We could come to him with ideas, argue for them, and if he liked what he heard, he would say, 'Great! Give it a try!'"

So Sam Proctor was at Rutgers when the idea of a GCOP was born. So was Frances Riley, a native New Yorker who hates cars and loves teaching. At Rutgers, where she came as an adult student after running a community-based service program, she is professor of social and philosophical foundations of education. Rutgers was invited to submit a proposal for a GCOP, and in 1970 BEPD approved a grant for the first year of a GCOP program, the only one of its kind in the country. Four more grants to Rutgers have followed, 34 GCOP interns have earned their Master of Education degrees, and 20 more are working their way through right now. Before the program comes to an end (June 30, 1975), GCOP will have been a genuine career opportunity for more than 50 men and women whose energy and value might otherwise have been burned up, banging on the system's closed doors.

THE PATH OF MOST RESISTANCE

The hardest door to open was at Rutgers itself, as Fran Riley remembers it. "The 'non-graduate' thing frightened everybody. They were afraid for the university's standards, and a few were afraid of the influx of Black, poor, 'street smart' people." Sam Proctor is a bit harsher:

> A lot of academics spend their time dreaming up ways to exclude people, the way medical schools and law schools do. And here we were planning to let in the ones they would be first to reject. They were uptight.

Rutgers hasn't remained uptight. Fran Riley considers the changes there among GCOP's major accomplishments. "Think of it. One of the best, most competitive graduate schools in the country has accepted 14 GCOP students into doctoral programs. There might be as many as 40 or 50 applicants for each opening in some of the programs here, and our students are being accepted."

Riley points to changes in the Rutgers Graduate School of Education catalog to prove GCOP's impact. The 1970-71 catalog explains who is likely to qualify for admission:

> Admissions to the Graduate School of Education is both competitive and selective. Those individuals are encouraged to apply for admission who have been graduated from approved institutions of learning with an academic average

> that indicates high potential for the successful completion of a graduate degree program offered by the School.

And at the bottom of the page there is a line about "exceptional cases," "modified admission requirements," and decision by an admissions committee subject to final approval by the Dean.

The 1973-74/1974-75 catalog states, at the top of the page:

> Those persons are encouraged to apply who, while not possessing the baccalaureate degree, are judged to have similar potential, by reason of maturity, training or experience, for the successful completion of a graduate degree program offered by the School.

The Dean's approval is no longer required.

"COP has always talked about 'institutionalizing change,' and so has the whole Office of Education," Riley says. "We have done it here." In fact, Riley is proud of GCOP's impact on the university, and she is proud of the university's reaction. "Some of the sceptics are now among our strongest supporters," she says. "They have gotten turned on by their exposure to the GCOP students, and that has helped them overcome their worries about the university's standards, and about minority and poor people generally."

Almost without exception GCOP students are non-white and poor. The vital statistics for the first three classes (the present class is not included, although its data would look much the same):

1) 23 men, all but one are veterans, and 18 women.

2) An age range of 24-59, with an average age of 34.

3) 22 married, 13 divorced, only six single.

4) A total of 77 children among the married and formerly married.

5) 27 from New Jersey, the rest from 14 other states.

6) 34 Black, four Puerto Rican, two white, and one Native American.

WHERE THE MONEY COMES FROM

Most of the financial support came from the GCOP program and the GI Bill. The GCOP program can provide up to $5,200 a year to interns who cannot otherwise afford to go to school. (GCOP pays the university tuition also). Twenty-eight of the 41 received some sort of GCOP stipend. Eighteen interns were entitled to veteran's benefits (generally the GI Bill), two had Ford Foundation scholarships, and many were working either part-time or full-time.

"The program requires 36 credit hours plus an internship," Associate Director Riley explains. "And that means a calendar year of full-time study. But many students keep on working, which means it takes them longer to get through. Even our maximum stipend of $5,200 isn't much if you have three or four children to support.

THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE STATISTICS

Who are the GCOP interns behind that statistical profile? Let's consider some cases:

LEWIS* is 46. He was a drug addict at one time, and later an alcoholic. He has two grown children from a previous marriage, and a new wife and baby. His wife works as a nurse's aide, and before GCOP Lewis was working as a counselor in a YWCA and going to a community college (where he earned 45 credit hours). Admission into GCOP hasn't meant a free ride on a gravy train--in fact, he missed two weeks of classes because he couldn't afford the train fare from Newark to Rutgers, and he was too proud to ask Rutgers for help. (Fran Riley arranged for the financial aid office to issue an advance, and then she got another student to hand-deliver the check the same day.)

JEROME was the only Black at his college in the early 1950s. He remembers being one of about 25 Blacks in the entire city of 270,000. (Jerome was an outstanding athlete, as you might have guessed.) He came poorly prepared for college from an all-Black high school in the south, arrived at mid-semester, and immediately fell further behind. He lasted nearly three years (his athletic ability may have been a factor), but finally flunked out. He played minor league baseball for two seasons, held various jobs in the human resources areas, did a stint in the Job Corps, and began taking courses at a community college.

Jerome was a classic "bad risk," an applicant whom most institutions wouldn't even consider. Jerome didn't even know how to apply for admission, which is something middle class kids learn in high school. His first letter to GCOP was handwritten on yellow lined paper, ("Type it on plain white bond," the guidance counselors say) and replete with misspellings ("accademicly" and "arround"). He submitted a second letter, corrected and typed on plain bond, and that made him sound a little more the way applicants are supposed to. GCOP's screening committee apparently wasn't affected by either letter, or by the two taken together. One committee member's notes read, "nice guy--direct" and "got promoted on the job but couldn't handle it."

In fact, Jerome was admitted into GCOP because his "track record--and that doesn't mean athletic ability--amply demonstrated a commitment to education and to self-improvement," Fran Riley says. "If Jerome, or someone like him, were white and middle class, he would already be in a leadership position," Riley says. "Many poor, non-white Americans never really have the opportunity for a career, in the real sense of the word. A career implies the chance to make choices, to have attractive options to choose among, and to have real control over your own life. The life circumstances of most poor and non-white just do not provide career opportunities."

*The names have been changed, of course.

That doesn't mean that the poor and non-white don't believe in the American Dream or the work ethic. Consider EDYTHE, A GCOP intern. She was rejected when she first applied because she hadn't had enough college training. One year later she had earned 16 more credits at a community college. In support of her second application she wrote (handwritten, but not on yellow lined paper):

> My job consists of house cleaning, doing laundry and whatever else I am told to do. Since my illness I have been receiving welfare assistance. I receive for my daughter and self $214 monthly, out of which I pay rent, electric, gas (for cooking and heating), water, and buy clothing. My rent is $166 so you see there is never enough. I detest every minute of welfare, but I had no other choice. I have an application in every institution, agency and factory or you name it, I have applied... I work wherever I can as long as it is decent and honest work. It is now 4:30 a.m. At 5:30 I will be in the nursing home working in the laundry... It would have been hard to explain this to you, because I am a doer, not a talker.
>
> You ask, could I do the work there since I been out of school so long. "Yes, I can do anything given a chance."

Edythe's second application to the GCOP program was successful.

JAMES is 27, a Vietnam veteran from the West Coast, and one of four whites in the program. He came to GCOP from a COP program, and he got into COP only after enrolling in college. "I guess they knew I was having trouble making ends meet, and they knew I was interested in elementary education," he explains. The director of the COP project in Oregon told James about GCOP, and soon he was on his way to New Brunswick, New Jersey. His internship in a Trenton elementary school consists of developing short units for 5th and 6th graders. In one unit five boys and five girls are building their own rockets ("We are going to fly them too"), and later he will be tutoring another small group in reading. James spends about an hour a day talking with the principal. One regular topic of conversation is the difficulty of finding an empty classroom for James to teach in. James has had to talk about his own housing, because his rent was just raised from $220 to $250 a month for a 1-bedroom apartment. If he cannot find something larger and cheaper, James will have to send his wife and three children--ages 4 1/2, 2 1/2, and six weeks--back to Oregon, where they can live with his wife's family.*

Conversations like those between James and his principal are designed into each internship. "We want them to have a 'vertical slice' into the education business, so they see administrators, parents, and even the school board," Riley says. Two GCOP interns have begun calling and visiting parents; another has been accompanying his 7th grade social studies class to its math, English and shop classes, even walking with them in the halls. "They are different kids out of the classroom," he says, "Bright, enthusiastic, full of talk, full of play. Why do classrooms shut that energy off? We have to change that somehow."

*Director Proctor and Associate Director Riley were able to help James find less expensive housing.

CHANGES ALONG THE WAY

The internship--a full year--has become the most valuable part of the program, according to the students. It wasn't even part of the original design, according to Proctor. "Things have changed quite a bit since that first proposal," he says. "Once we got underway we realized that an internship was necessary, so we arranged for things for the second semester with three nearby schools with COP programs. We have had an internship ever since." Riley notes that the program design did not include certification, leading to more scrambling during that hectic first year. The scrambling was successful, and every graduate has earned certification in social studies education. Eighteen are now working in administrative positions. ("Schools don't care what you are certified in, as long as you are certified," Riley says.) Many GCOP graduates are now working on certification for administrative positions. In fact, the original notion of training COP evaluators got lost along the way. Part of any innovation is the freedom to discover where you are going as you go, and GCOP is a good example of a sound investment in "human resources" (i.e., people) without a rigid program formula.

The scrambling didn't end after the 1970-71 program year. Associate Director Riley, who runs the day-to-day operation, is a scrambler in the classic Fran Tarkenton mold. Her job entails finding emergency money for train fare, helping locate housing, cutting red tape wherever it exists, and being something of an ombudsman for the GCOP class. There is also a certain amount of "hand holding" through the early confusion of a large university. "Rutgers can be intimidating at first," Riley says, "but the GCOP class usually becomes a tight group, very supportive of each other." Much of Riley's work is accomplished through her year-long seminar, "Issues in Urban Education," solely for GCOP interns. "We look at all the key issues," she explains, "But often we will get off into things that are bothering the group. Each class becomes a 'family,' providing moral and emotional support, and a lot of the family-building takes place in that seminar."

GCOP students also take courses in educational history, statistics, educational philosophy, Afro-American history, and so forth, in classes with other Rutgers students. That is where the program has proved itself, Riley says, because that's where the GCOP students have earned their way into doctoral programs.

EVALUATING GCOP: 1) THE STUDENTS

The impact of GCOP is not limited to Rutgers campus, of course. One student put it this way:

> First of all, it has changed our lives. A lot of us have worked very hard for a chance, and now we have it, and we are proving we can make it. We are helping kids from poor families too, because we've been there. A lot of teachers are too middle-class to get down with the kids.

Said another:

> I can now see a different side of life. GCOP was not a forum for racial views. It helped us seek the truth whatever it was. Professors made us look at many sides of issues. It gave us a broader view.

And:

> GCOP is God's gift to mankind. No one who went through it was unchanged. We were exposed to different ways of thinking. We had come with a stereotyped way of thinking and this changed. I make the same money now at my new job as I did before GCOP. But GCOP has allowed me to grow. It forced all of us to look at the other side of everything. I came from a background that taught me not to talk back to or make a ruction with whites. My professors changed that.

One more student's views:

> Now I am beginning to make some "ripples." This has been a real opportunity for me. Before GCOP I was headed in one direction and now I've turned 180°.

EVALUATING GCOP: 2) THE EVALUATORS

But evaluators and decision-makers are taught to discount the enthusiasm of participants, and probably with good reason. Yet the "light in their eyes" is genuine, even if it doesn't show up on the data collection instruments. GCOP has been formally evaluated--which means that an attempt was made to quantify the program. Here's what the evaluators* conclude:

> It is the judgement of CTC that the 1973 - 1974 Career Opportunities Program of Rutgers University was designed and developed in such fashion as to positively promote the increase of educational opportunities to lower-income persons and to provide the additional training needed to improve the quality of the performance of educators.
>
> The COP Program is generally considered successful by the participants, i.e., professional staff, students and cooperating community agencies.
>
> The administrative procedures, structure and activities of the COP Program are generally efficient, effective and satisfactory as viewed by CTC.

*Communication Technology Corporation, Marlton, New Jersey. The "Rutgers University Graduate School of Education Career Opportunity Program Evaluation Report 1973-1974" is dated August 1974 and is about as exciting as the title suggests.

The respect indicated by the students for the professional staff in the COP Program is high, in that they feel the staff are dedicated professionals who have a sincere interest in the well-being of the students.

The high quality COP seminar in this year's program should be expanded to meet the expressed desires of the students in the COP Program. This expansion would include training for research methodology.

It is CTC's opinion that the instructional activities, as described in the available documentation, were developed to provide the students with a wide diversification of courses relevant to their professional roles and helpful to their particular teaching situations.

In sum, most everything is fine. And then the evaluators recommend, in professional lingo, a few changes - including a larger role for the evaluators.

An attempt should be made to relate all COP objectives (goals) to measurable student, staff, or service performance outcomes. This should be accomplished in order to provide clear and measurable statements upon which subsequent evaluations can be performed.

There should be continued efforts by the Career Opportunities Program at increasing the rapport with the Rutgers University Community.

The evaluation process should be initiated at the beginning of the school year. This will insure that the evaluator has sufficient time to tailor the evaluation design to the Rutgers Program and to collect, analyze and interpret the volume and categories of data appropriate for the magnitude of the program.*

In other words, do more of what you are already doing, but try to quantify it. And give the evaluators more time.

GCOP: THE END IS IN SIGHT

But neither an evaluator's report filled with dense praise, nor a demagogic speech will change the course GCOP finds itself on, a "natural death" brought on by the expiration of the Education Professions Development Act on June 30, 1975. Even if the Congress has not renewed the entire Higher Education Act (also slated to expire that day), the pro-forma "continuing resolution" will not continue GCOP or COP. COP's authorization--Congress's specific permission--expires that day, and unless specific permission to exist is again granted, GCOP will quite quietly disappear.

*There were also two recommendations regarding the evaluation instruments being prepared for a larger study. Explaining them would require an even longer footnote.

"The federal government ought to be expanding the program, not allowing it to die," Sam Proctor says. "We could double the program without any increase in administrative costs, and the cost-per-intern (slightly more than $10,000) is less than half of what it costs to train a cadet at West Point or a midshipman at the Naval Academy. Surely this society ought to be reopening doors for those who missed the opportunity--through no fault of their own--the first time around."

A Rutgers GCOP intern put the case this way:

> Without the GCOP program the spark to teach might have died in many of us, as it has died in many from our background who haven't had the opportunity we are having.